

## **Building Community Engagement in Higher Education: Public Sociology at Missouri State University**

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*Many academic departments are making efforts to increase faculty and student community engagement as part of a movement to revitalize the civic function of higher education. A case study of the development of a public sociology program provides examples of steps that can be taken to involve educators and students in communities in multifaceted ways. The development of the program shows that it is critical to formally recognize the value of community-engaged activities and to institutionalize rewards for faculty who practice public scholarship and provide community services. Likewise, offering students a system of advancing opportunities for more prolonged and in-depth involvement in the community is needed to enrich their educational experiences, maximize the development of their civic and political skills, and improve the value of students' contributions to community partners.*

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Recently, leaders of the Association of American Colleges and Universities sounded a clarion call for stronger connections and more collaboration between universities and their communities and for greater civic learning among the nation's college students. Citing America's "civic malaise" and "anemic U.S. civic health," authors of the AAC&U's report argued that we are at a "crucible moment" in the history of higher education (2012, p. 6). Without redoubled efforts to connect "town and gown" and to increase students' commitment to and capacities for civic participation, the United States risks becoming a second-rate democracy and an increasingly fragmented society.

The AAC&U report is the latest in a string of publications, beginning in the 1990s, that emphasizes the importance of increased public engagement by faculty and students. Bok (1990) warned that universities had become detached from their communities and from society, and he maintained that professors need to focus more on studying social problems and public issues. Later the same year, Boyer encouraged members of the professorate to re-evaluate their priorities and to place greater emphasis on community-engaged scholarship and on the preparation of students to take their place in "a citizenry that can promote the public good" (1990, p. 78).

These arguments were calls for universities to return to some of the root purposes of public higher education that had been established in the mid-19th century (Bridger & Alter, 2006; Kellogg Commission, 1999).

There is some evidence that the latest movement to enhance the civic mission of higher may be floundering, or, as Hartley, Saltmarsh, and Clayton put it, “the civic engagement movement has hit a wall” (2012, p. 404). The movement may be losing steam for two reasons: First, a lack of institutional supports, including expanded definitions of scholarship and supportive reward policies, is likely limiting faculty engagement in community affairs. Second, the expansion of service-learning, while vitally important, may not be wholly sufficient to provide students with the range and depth of community-learning experiences needed to prepare them for civic and political engagement beyond future volunteering (Boyte, 2008; Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, & Corngold, 2007; Longo, 2004).

New initiatives are needed that both broaden faculty involvement in the community and strengthen the development of students’ public commitments and civic skills. Below we provide a case study of how one academic program – sociology – has strengthened faculty civic engagement via public scholarship and community service, and how sociology students are offered advancing levels of opportunities for community-based learning. Community-engaged educational practices bring significant mutual benefits to faculty, students, and local public agencies alike. Many of the ideas and examples offered below are transferrable to other academic departments and units throughout colleges and universities as they strive to reinvigorate the civic function of higher education in the United States.

### **Public Sociology and Community Engagement**

Paralleling arguments about disengaged universities, the president of the American Sociological Association advocated in 2004 that the discipline return to its historical roots by re-emphasizing public sociology, an approach that links faculty activities with community improvement and that educates students to become engaged citizens (Burawoy, 2005). By that time, Missouri State University sociology faculty had integrated service-learning into some of their classes (Knapp, 1999). However, they recognized that sustained community engagement necessarily involves far more than service-learning. Thus, they began developing a public sociology program, which hinged upon: 1) making curricular revisions, 2) enhancing public scholarship, 3) strengthening community service by faculty, and 4) adding more community-based experiential learning opportunities for students. The first three changes are described in this section; the fourth development is discussed from the students’ perspective in later sections.

For the first change, the sociology curriculum was revamped to include a new required core course, Public Sociology and Community Studies, which includes service-learning. The new degree program also required that students take at least one elective course that has a significant community engagement component and another elective class that exposes them to issues of diversity and inequality in the community.

To begin instituting the second change – enhancing public scholarship – faculty revised the departmental promotion and tenure document to establish the legitimacy of community-engaged research. This move is vital, because while journal articles effectively communicate research results to academic audiences, they are of little use in disseminating the findings of community-based studies to local leaders who can act on the findings (Light, 2005; Seifer et al., 2012). Department faculty decided not to get bogged down in trying to develop a narrow and concrete definition of public scholarship, avoiding the “definitional anarchy” (Sandmann, 2008, p. 91) that emerged as Boyer’s (1990) scholarship of application morphed into concepts of public scholarship, engaged scholarship, and community-based research. Instead, faculty focused on establishing the value of public scholarship, broadening the meaning of “publications” to include other written products, and redefining the peer-review process.

The new promotion and tenure policy first emphasized the value of public scholarship: “The Department values and encourages engaged or applied scholarship,” [which] “can be counted toward tenure and promotion as a portion, even a significant portion, of a candidate’s scholarly activity” (Reappointment, 2012, pp. 4, 5). Next, the new policy broadened the definition of a scholarly document to include “some sort of product available to a constituency” (p. 5). Finally, the policy stated that public scholarship products must be peer-reviewed using at least one of two methods. The candidate for promotion or tenure may submit a list of individuals who “have the credentials and professional reputation appropriate to evaluate the engaged scholarly activity” (Reappointment, 2012, p. 5). The department head then selects and contacts an individual from the list who will act as a peer reviewer. A second method is available whereby the candidate may “solicit letters from credible community or agency leaders . . . [who] provide a detailed, specific discussion on the impact of a particular project or projects on either their agency or a community-based group” (*Ibid.*). Candidates may combine both forms of peer review for the same product.

With the legitimacy of public scholarship established, faculty members increased their research both *on* the community and *with* the community. Research on the community focused largely on the study of local social capital. A 2009 report (Stout, Knapp, & Harms, 2009) found that local civic participation was limited by high levels of mistrust and alienation

associated with a lack of bridging social capital (i.e., trust and connections across diverse groups). These findings were disseminated through a series of presentations before local boards and committees, and they were incorporated into two programs. One was an initiative by city leaders to broaden and diversify citizens' involvement in writing and implementing the city's new long-range plan. The other was a collaborative effort by the city government, sociology program, and a coalition of non-profit organizations to strengthen ties across diverse groups in two low-income neighborhoods. The City Manager stated that "the Social Capital Survey report proved to be extremely valuable to the city of Springfield and others interested in re-establishing civic engagement in our community" (Stout et al., 2011, p. 23).

Public scholarship *with* the community involved collaborating with officials from local non-profit organizations and public agencies to conduct studies that provided them with information to meet their agencies' need or to address local social issues. In this form of public scholarship, faculty members abandoned their traditional role as expert adviser and instead took a back seat to local officials who are first among equals in a genuinely collaborative research process (O'Meara et al., 2011). Examples of research *with* the community included assessing the impacts of a preschool art education program, organizing and analyzing police traffic stop data related to possible racial profiling, modeling social networks among local leaders, evaluating how non-profit organizations streamline services in periods of tight budgets, and identifying the characteristics and needs of homeless adults and families.

Initially, faculty members did not involve students in these projects. However, in 2011, they expanded their research *with* the community by involving students in studies of high-risk and homeless youth, clients of food pantries, participants in an after-school sports program, local Habitat for Humanity homeowners, and homeless adults.

Recognizing that faculty members' engagement in the community needed to be multifaceted and not restricted to research, sociologists brought about the third program change, broadening faculty involvement in the community, by incentivizing community service. The revised promotion and tenure document placed community service on par with service to the department and the university, and a new pay for performance policy allowed tenured professors to count service for as much as 20 percent of their academic duties. To receive any additional pay for a performance rating beyond "competent," faculty members needed to have served on a community committee, task force, or organizational board (Pay for Performance, 2008).

Through their community service, sociologists engaged in two

forms of public sociology (Burawoy, 2005, p.7). They practiced “organic public sociology” by becoming members and officers of city government task forces, local social services organizations, and community advancement groups. They worked in close connection with other community members on a number of public improvement programs. Sociology faculty also practiced “traditional public sociology,” which is disseminating empirical evidence and sociological insights to bring about more informed public dialogues on local and national issues. They spread research findings and sociological views on community issues through interviews with print, television, and radio media, via regular editorials in the local newspaper, and through presentations at meetings of various civic organizations, social service agencies, and other groups.

By recognizing and rewarding public scholarship *in and for* the community and through valuing and incentivizing diverse forms of local service, community engagement by sociology faculty rose substantially. It should be noted, however, that our successful efforts to increase faculty’s community engagement took place in a specific institutional and disciplinary environment. Rewarding public scholarship and service likely was facilitated by Missouri State University’s statewide mission in public affairs. Our program’s emphasis on community-based research and service fit well with and enhanced the University’s public affairs mission. Thus, it could be argued that community engagement by faculty has more institutional room to grow at Missouri State University than at some other institutions.

Similarly, the discipline of sociology may be more receptive to public scholarship and service than other academic fields. The acceptance of public sociology is not universal. For example, at the 2004 meetings of the American Sociological Association, the renowned Harvard sociologist William Julius Wilson told a frustrated graduate student to tamp down her desire for public scholarship and service by advising her to “wait until you get tenure. I’m sorry, but that’s the way it is” (as cited in Light, 2005, p. 1647). Nonetheless, community engagement has been increasingly emphasized in sociology programs across the United States. This disciplinary trend constitutes more fertile soil for community engagement by faculty than is found in some other fields.

Although the reforms discussed above took place in a supportive institutional and disciplinary environment, many of the steps mentioned for increasing faculty members’ public scholarship and community service can be adapted by other academic units and other universities to enhance the civic component of higher education in the United States. As Hartley et al. (2012) noted, revising the curriculum, redefining scholarship, and revamping reward policies all are necessary to keep the civic engagement movement moving forward.

While engaging faculty more in the community establishes a good foundation, the key to building a more engaged program is developing a series of ways to involve students with the community that not only enhances their understanding of academic disciplines but also actively builds their civic skills and strengthens their commitment to community and political engagement. A small number of faculty members can make a significant contribution to the community, but their impact pales in comparison with the present and future effects of much larger numbers of civically and politically-engaged students.

### **Benefits of Publicly Engaged Learning for Students and Communities**

Community-based learning is vital for enhancing the social development of students and for strengthening the development of their civic skills and commitment to civic involvement. Through such education, students cultivate tolerance, cooperation, and civic-mindedness, and they acquire an improved ability and desire to address community needs and social issues (Balciuniene & Natalija, 2008; Knapp, Fisher, & Levesque-Bristol, 2010; Matthews, 2012; Mooney & Edwards, 2001). Programs and policies that emphasize community-engaged learning also provide numerous academic and professional benefits for students due largely to the de-contextualized nature of learning in classroom settings (Peterson, 2009).

Academically, Mooney and Edwards (2001) emphasized that community-based learning leads students to develop their ability to think critically and reason analytically while simultaneously refining complex reading, writing, and public presentation skills. These benefits accrue because engaged learning is an active process through which students receive a well-rounded education and gain real life experiences in their field (McKinney, Saxe, & Cobb, 1998; Zhao & Kuh, 2004).

As for professional benefits, community-based experiential learning prepares undergraduates for the challenges of graduate school or immediate employment after graduation arguably better than traditional forms of learning. Undergraduates exposed to engaged learning develop important problem-solving, collaborative, and leadership skills, in addition to making connections between educational and career goals (Mooney & Edwards, 2001; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). Given such positive social developmental, academic, and professional outcomes, it is clear that increasing opportunities for community-engaged learning in higher education is decidedly beneficial to students.

The advantages the community enjoys from student involvement also can be substantial, provided that engagement is reciprocal and that the

university and community work together as equal collaborators on a shared agenda (Ramaley, 2003). This requires the university and its faculty to be responsive to the suggestions and complaints of community partners. Though community partners have access to valuable campus assets, including both *human* resources in the form of faculty expertise and student labor and *financial* resources in the form of grant opportunities and access to university facilities, it cannot be assumed that community partners always will benefit greatly from their association with the university (Blouin & Perry, 2009). Certainly, there are expenditures for partners who facilitate engaged activities, particularly service-learning. According to Blouin and Perry (2009), these costs fall into two categories: “risks to the organization and investments of resources that do not yield tangible returns for the organization” (p. 126).

One organizational risk is that unreliable or disrespectful service-learners can damage the reputations of the community partners they represent. Further, a considerable expenditure of community resources is necessary to train, supervise, and support service-learners, who do not always perform with enough efficiency to justify the utilization of such assets. Indeed, some community organizations have expressed frustration with “students who were unwilling to work hard, unable to take initiative or seemed unconcerned with producing quality results” (Blouin & Perry, 2009, p. 127). To make sure that local agency partners benefit from students’ community engagement, it is important that programs adequately motivate and prepare students for effective involvement in the community. And, as was noted above, it is important that students go beyond volunteering to participate in other forms of community-based learning that will broaden their civic skills and strengthen their commitment to community and political engagement. These goals can be accomplished, in part, by offering students multiple types and levels of community-based learning.

## **Advancing Levels of Opportunity**

To ensure that local agency partners and students both benefit greatly from the association, undergraduates should be provided with opportunities to develop their community interests, with appropriate training for the tasks they are expected to complete, and with incentives rewarding strong performance. These goals can be accomplished by structuring undergraduate education so that students have access to advancing levels of opportunities for community-engaged learning and public scholarship. Given high numbers of transfer students and problems of nesting prerequisites within a series of required courses, it is seldom practical to tightly embed advancing levels of community-based learning into the curricular structure. Nonetheless, when attention is paid to the types of experiential learning opportunities that students are offered as they move through a de-

gree program, the problems of poorly-prepared, unmotivated students can be minimized, and the positive outcomes of community-based learning can be maximized. Importantly, this crucial insight emerged not from faculty discussions about the public sociology program, but from undergraduates reflecting on their experiences in the program.

The starting point of contextual intervention involves the observation that things are not as one might desire in a specific area. The observer attempts to bring about change only to find that s/he does not possess the individual power to fully transform the space. Thus, the work ends up being contextual: They intervene in a context, in a moment, to temporarily, haltingly – and in a limited way – alter the undesirable circumstance.

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Students identified three tiers of advancing levels of community engagement. Each tier offers progressively greater benefits to students while allowing them to develop their knowledge of local issues and their civic skills. Furthermore, the benefits of each level become progressively more inclusive; advantages accrue only to students in the first tier, then expand to include community partners and faculty in the higher tiers. The first tier includes in-class and out-of-class activities made available through introductory and elective courses, as well as via volunteer opportunities through student clubs. This preliminary stage allows students to start developing their service interests without requiring them to meet intensive demands from community partners. Furthermore, by participating in learning exercises of this nature, students expand their network of personal contacts in the community and integrate abstract concepts into their practical experience (Mooney & Edwards, 2001, p. 183).

An example of a tier one *in-class* activity in the public sociology



**Table 1: Levels of Increasing Opportunity**

Tier and Description	Benefits to Students
<p><b>Tier 1: In and Out-of-Class Activities</b></p> <p>Examples:</p> <p>In-Class Community Speakers, Field Trips, Out of Class Assignments, Club Events</p>	<p>Increased awareness of community issues</p> <p>Introduction to the inner workings of community organizations and the structural problems and barriers such groups face</p> <p>Discussion of possible volunteer opportunities</p>
<p><b>Tier 1: In and Out-of-Class Activities</b></p> <p>Examples:</p> <p>In-Class Community Speakers, Field Trips, Out of Class Assignments, Club Events</p>	<p>Provision of further opportunities to become involved with community organizations of interest</p> <p>Development of social networks for future employment and research opportunities</p> <p>Provision of experiential learning and professional skill building</p>
<p><b>Tier 3: Community-Based Research</b></p> <p>Examples:</p> <p>Paid Undergraduate Research Assistantship and/or Independent Research Course</p>	<p>Experiences of greater motivation and gains in self- and social-efficacy through contributions to the community</p> <p>Cultivation of professional, collaborative, critical-thinking, and methodological skills to prepare students for graduate school</p> <p>Expansion of local networks and contacts for future employment opportunities</p>

<b>for Community Engagement</b>	
Benefits to Community	Benefits to Faculty
<p>Increased manpower provided by volunteers allows organizations to broaden efforts within the community</p> <p>Increased awareness within the university and the community thanks to volunteer involvement</p>	<p>More effective teaching by adding experiential learning activities to instructional tool box</p> <p>Stronger connections with community leaders</p>
<p>Receipt of expertise from students and faculty that can be used to improve community studies</p> <p>Access to reports which strengthen grant proposals, aid in community education and public awareness efforts, and inform program development</p>	<p>Increased intrinsic rewards of mixing professional and public scholarship</p> <p>More in-depth and gratifying relationships with advanced undergraduate students (RAs)</p>

curriculum is utilizing community leaders as guest speakers in freshman-level classes. Having the director of a homeless shelter discuss poverty or the manager of a domestic violence shelter talk about family violence not only gives students specific information about broad social issues, such personal presentations motivate students to get more involved with community agencies that address those issues. Field trips, such as visits to the landfill and a community-supported farm in the environmental sociology class, also introduce students to community-engaged learning.

The most extensive first tier *out-of-class* exercise is a social agency report project completed by students in some sections of the general education sociology course. Students select a local social service agency that they want to learn about and conduct a literature search for information on the issue addressed by that agency. After reading about and receiving instructions in interviewing methods, students interview an official at the social service agency. They take a tour of the organization and collect any information that the agency makes available to the public. Students then combine information from their literature review, interview, and on-site observations into a report. After creating tri-fold display boards with photos, graphs, and information from their report, students then present their information about community agencies in a Societal Issues & Community Service Fair that is open to all students, staff, and faculty. This is another way for students to gain first-hand knowledge of a local community problem and of an agency that works to reduce that problem.

After undergraduates have had sufficient time to cultivate their interests and develop basic academic and professional skills, they can progress to the second tier of advancing opportunity. At this level, students have the chance to participate in internships and service-learning that further promotes the development of student interests and abilities through long-term experiential learning. Benefits also begin to accrue to community partners as students provide expertise and labor power that free up agency resources. The internship in applied sociology, for instance, offers students the opportunity to earn academic credit while volunteering in a professional environment with an approved community partner. Written reflection assignments enhance students' community-based experiential learning. One recent intern volunteered at the local office of Planned Parenthood where she participated in several public awareness events throughout town. She thus not only learned about programs to promote women's health at one agency, she also learned about other local organizations. The community partner also benefited greatly. The agency's volunteer coordinator explained that the student was "an exceptional asset" to the organization and that her "flexible and autonomous work" was a "figurative life-saver" at times (personal communication, November 27, 2012).

In addition to applied sociology internships, the second tier of increasing opportunity also includes service-learning. This form of community-based experiential learning can cultivate an ethos of civic responsibility that prepares students for future political and social leadership (Levesque-Bristol, Knapp, & Fisher, 2010). To ensure that students receive exposure to this valuable educational opportunity, the public sociology program offers two forms of service-learning, and at least one service-learning experience is required of all sociology majors. The Public Sociology and Community Studies course is an integrated service-learning (ISL) class in which all students complete 15 to 20 hours of service at an approved community agency and present in-class oral summaries of what they learned at the agency. This ISL course is important because some undergraduates lack the time required for voluntary participation in the second form of service-learning, component service-learning (CSL), which is an optional one-hour course attached to several upper-division sociology elective classes. CSL requires 40 hours of service and involves both written and oral reflection assignments. By thoughtfully selecting service sites, communicating regularly with site supervisors, requiring reflection on and oral communication of learning experiences, and offering two forms of service-learning, faculty attempt to maximize the benefits of service-learning for sociology majors.

The first two tiers are concerned primarily with the development of service interests and the provision of experiences to enhance students' present and future civic engagement. The last tier provides some students with opportunities for deeper engagement with community leaders and with faculty through community-based research. At this highest level of community-engaged learning, upper-division students who have completed requisite courses in research methodology and statistics, and who have done well in the previous tiers, are provided with opportunities for community-based research through independent studies for credit and/or through paid assistantships. The prospect of course credit and/or paid work that relates to previously cultivated service interests provides a strong incentive for advanced undergraduates to invest the time and energy necessary to ensure successful community collaborations.

Conducting research with community partners and faculty members represents a high order of community-engaged learning. It also provides students with opportunities to advance their application of methodological skills and to establish network connections in the community that go beyond what is otherwise available in the standard curriculum. Community partners benefit as students contribute their outside perspective and novel ideas and produce reports that can be used to further organizational goals. Additionally, student researchers allow faculty more time to be involved in the community through other public scholarship and/or service.

By developing the abilities of students through the three advancing levels of opportunity, all parties concerned benefit. Before they volunteer with local agencies through service-learning or an applied sociology internship, most students will have been exposed to in-class and/or out-of-class activities that will have somewhat motivated and prepared them for long-term community-based experiential learning. Community partners benefit from working with students who have had the opportunity to develop their service interests and skills. And, students should experience a stronger sense of having made a difference through being prepared for volunteering. More effective service-learning both benefits local agencies and maximizes the development of students' self- and social-efficacy. At the highest level, advanced students further develop civic and political skills necessary for collaborative work to address community problems. By expanding their local networks and developing their communication, collaboration, critical-thinking, and problem-solving skills, students are better prepared for future community engagement.

To further illustrate the benefits of these advancing tiers of community-engaged learning to students and to local agency partners, next we present three case studies of students who engaged in a variety of experiential learning activities, including the highest tier of collaborative public scholarship. The insights provided by students help close a glaring gap in the extant literature, which largely has ignored the vital experiences of students.

### **Students' Experiences of Community-Engaged Learning**

A curious and unfortunate gap exists in the literature on how to develop more community-engaged academic programs; namely, there is very little information from students themselves about their experiences of and their benefits from engaged activities. Students and their experiences can serve as a valuable resource in their own right, and faculty can benefit from exposure to the perspectives and concerns of the student population (McKinney et al., 1998). Burawoy encourages faculty to think of students "as carriers of a rich lived experience," and he urges educators to engage students in a dialogue "starting from where they are, not from where we are" (2004, p. 9). The three case studies presented below are first-person accounts of the "rich lived experience" that community-engaged learning can provide for students.

#### **Case Study One**

From my first exposure to the discipline, I developed a strong interest in sociology. I was intrigued by the theoretical underpinnings of the field, but I had a difficult time imagining how I might apply such knowl-

edge practically. The courses I later completed in research methodology and statistics allowed me to gain a better understanding of potential practical uses of this field of study, but I still had a difficult time understanding how I would be able to apply what I was learning in a way that would have a real impact in the world. Then, in the summer of 2012, I enrolled in an independent study course in sociological research in which I contributed to a collaborative initiative between the sociology program, city government, and a coalition of local social service agencies.

The new program was designed to promote community cohesion and economic development in two high-poverty areas in Springfield, Missouri, by providing residents of those neighborhoods with regular meetings and activities in which they could come together to identify problems in their communities, to propose solutions, and to access resources through the university, city government, and service agencies to implement their solutions. Faculty, public officials, and service agency leaders worked in concert as equal partners, utilizing their areas of expertise and access to disparate sources of funding to implement the pilot program. Rather than acting as expert advisors prescribing the direction of change, the organizers served as facilitators for action directed by members of the neighborhoods themselves.

My program assessment showed that participants, who were recruited using grassroots methods, experienced reductions in alienation, increases in personal efficacy, and improvements in civic skills. Greater civic engagement resulted from the design and implementation of the program, which promoted community interaction and solidarity as well as an awareness of community issues. By building network connections both within the neighborhood itself and between the neighborhood and the larger community, participants were given greater access to the human and financial resources locally available, and thus experienced noticeable increases in efficacy and social empowerment.

Such benefits were strongly mirrored in my own experience contributing to this project. Statistically assessing the impacts of the program through an analysis of pre and post-test questionnaires was an incredible catalyst that profoundly influenced my academic research interests and inspired my decision to apply for graduate school. This was the first time that I had been given the opportunity to apply what I had been learning in the classroom to the real world. By participating in this community-based research project, I began to understand that I could use my knowledge to contribute in a tangible way to the struggle against the many ills of society. Such feelings of social empowerment had an immediate and positive effect on my sense of personal efficacy, inspiring much greater self-confidence in my abilities, and motivating me to continue my education so that I may

better contribute to society. Now that I have seen the incredible benefits that civic engagement can bring, I am committed to not only continuing my own engagement but also to developing such behaviors and attitudes in others as well; it is now my strong belief that only in this way will our society be able to navigate the challenges of an increasingly difficult, polarized world.

### **Case Study Two**

From my entrance into the sociology program as a freshman, I have been able to participate in all three tiers of community engagement. During my first semester in a lower-level sociology course, students were required to research a local social problem and to write a proposal for its remediation. We also were encouraged to conduct interviews with individuals and organizations in the community dedicated to our chosen issue. This initial assignment not only helped me become more familiar with persons and resources in the local region, it also required me to practice basic qualitative research skills and formal academic writing, which would be stressed throughout the program.

Within the second tier, I completed a component service-learning section affiliated with a political sociology class. I completed over 40 hours of practical volunteer work by assisting in the voter registration process, preparing election ballots and related information materials for distribution to voters, aiding individuals with in-person absentee voting, and helping tabulate and verify final election results. In addition to giving me the opportunity to expand my knowledge of the elections process and the institutions of government, this level of community-engagement allowed me to examine community diversity, local civic participation, and the influence of social capital within a community.

During my senior year, I became a paid research assistant contributing to community-based research. I worked on two different projects – one focused on literature reviews, and the other concentrated on survey data collection and analysis. The literature-based research provided the local newspaper with information for its two-year public journalism project on problems facing children in the metropolitan community. To assist the news staff, I gathered local and national information on juvenile crime, described policies and programs that might prevent juvenile crime and rehabilitate juvenile offenders, and proposed solutions that could be implemented at the local or regional level. This exercise in public scholarship allowed me to refine my skills examining a diverse assortment of sources for relevant information and preparing a concise report for both professional and public audiences.

I also collaborated with a faculty member and three officials from a local grief counseling agency to conduct a telephone survey of past agency clients. I participated in planning meetings with counseling center staff and the faculty member to craft the questionnaire and to decide how to administer the survey. Following the compilation and statistical analysis of the survey data, I co-authored a 40-page report summarizing the key findings, which was presented to the leadership of the organization. The report greatly benefited the community partner by providing information to help it enhance its programs and services to clients and by providing empirical data to support future grant applications. Working closely with leaders in the community and becoming engaged in a project that will improve the quality of life for local residents.

Through these two research projects, I developed a greater understanding of my chosen discipline of sociology. For example, the basic data analysis I conducted prepared me for higher-order quantitative methods taught in the statistics course that I later completed. Through community analyses and public scholarship, I was able to link theory and methods, and further advance my analytical, research, and writing skills. By actually practicing public sociology in the community I also developed a deeper understanding of how the academic world can bridge gaps and provide support to foster a more collaborative community able to progress toward solving social problems.

### **Case Study Three**

As an undergraduate student, I, too, participated in all three levels of community engagement. My first experience with community-based learning was in a Social Problems in the Community class, where several speakers from community organizations visited our class and addressed social issues from the local perspective. For example, the director of a large homeless shelter spoke with us about poverty and homelessness. We were introduced to the nature and extent of poverty in our area, to the inner workings of the organization, and to local economic conditions that contribute to poverty.

I was provided with additional opportunities to become involved in the community through service learning in both the program's required Public Sociology and Community Studies course and in other elective classes. Through service-learning, I volunteered over two semesters at a local center that provides a safe place for homeless and troubled youth to spend evenings, and one that offers emergency shelter, street outreach, transitional living, and other services. These opportunities provided me with significant benefits, including a more in-depth, first-hand understanding of community issues and of the functioning of community

organizations. However, it wasn't until my senior year when I was given the opportunity to participate in community-based research that I saw the full benefits of community engagement.

I co-authored the 2012 High Risk and Homeless Youth Report (HRHY) based upon surveys of 515 youths administered at 22 public organizations and services agencies in the area. A faculty member and I used descriptive and relational statistical analyses to determine common characteristics of the area's homeless youth population, and to identify factors contributing to youth homelessness. I was involved in almost every step of the project, collecting data, creating an SPSS data set, completing analyses of the data, and co-authoring and presenting the report.

The most rewarding aspect of working on this report is seeing the positive impact it has had on the community. The 2012 HRHY report currently is being used to raise community awareness through media events and public presentations, to develop new programs (such as an on-site adult education center) to better serve homeless youths, to generate collaboration among organizations, and to strengthen grant applications. The report also has been used to train homeless liaisons in school districts throughout the region, and it recently was added to the library collection in the Local History of Missouri Reference section.

Working on this project provided me with several academic benefits. First, the experience allowed me to substantially improve my research skills by applying what I had learned in methods courses to an actual study. Additionally, I was able to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills through the complicated process of designing and implementing research. Co-authoring a report with a university faculty member also allowed me a unique opportunity as an undergraduate student to work with, instead of under, a professional sociologist, which gave me a considerable amount of confidence in my academic abilities. Professionally, participating in community research allowed me to increase the reach of my social networks and gain valuable contacts within the community that can be used for future employment. Working on this report also heightened my motivation and commitment to my educational goals, and it strengthened my applications for graduate schools admissions and graduate research assistantships.

What I found most gratifying about this experience, however, was not the academic or professional benefits; it was the increased self-efficacy and confidence I attained by making a valuable contribution to my community. The program's focus on community-engaged learning and public scholarship has shown me first-hand that the best way to leave your mark on the world is to start by making a difference in your own community,

where your efforts are most effective in creating social change.

## Conclusions

A growing number of institutions of higher education in the United States are attempting to fulfill their two-fold civic mission of connecting members of the university with the local community and of developing skilled and committed students who will become active participants in civic and political affairs. However, such efforts often are limited by two barriers: a lack of institutional support for faculty engagement in the community and an over-reliance on volunteering and service-learning to develop students' civic skills and commitment to community and political engagement.

As Hartley et al. note, we need to "reshape the curriculum," "redefine scholarship," and revise "institutional reward policies" to better integrate community involvement with faculty teaching, research, and service activities (2010, p. 404). Courses that include significant community-based learning activities allow faculty to utilize experiential learning practices in their teaching. This can make them more effective instructors and connect them and their students with the community. Rewriting tenure and promotion and pay-for-performance documents rewards various forms of local service and thus incentivizes public scholarship.

Sociologists at Missouri State University addressed curricular issues by adding a new course in community studies, improving the application of two forms of service learning, expanding internships, and including undergraduates as research assistants in community-based studies. They also re-wrote faculty evaluation documents to formally recognize public scholarship and community service as activities that count significantly toward promotion and tenure, and toward the receipt of merit pay. Some of these practices may be adapted to the specific needs and conditions of other programs, departments, and universities. Nationwide, institutional obstacles to expanding public scholarship and service to the community remain. These must be overcome in some manner in order to sustain the current momentum for more community-engagement in higher education.

The second major barrier to effective civic education is an over-dependence on one form of student community engagement; namely, service-learning. Service-learning can be a very effective pedagogy for enhancing students' sense of self-efficacy, as service-learning students often report in reflection papers that they have made a difference in someone's life (Knapp et al., 2010). While this is a valuable learning outcome, service-learning experiences often do not foster the development of a broad mix of skills and commitments needed to prepare students to work with others through civic and political activities to address broader social problems. This is

because volunteering commonly is defined and experienced by students as an individual process. This individualized process often is insufficient to enhance students' "civic agency" (Boyte, 2008, p. 10) or social-efficacy, which is the experience of effectively collaborating with others to identify and reduce local problems. The often individualized process of service-learning may not be adequate by itself to meet the social purpose of civic education.

It was students who suggested a way around this barrier to more effective civic education. They pointed out that there was no coherence in the smorgasbord of experiential learning opportunities within our sociology program, and they suggested the three-tiered model of increasing opportunities for community engagement. We have begun using the three-tiered model in conjunction with a curricular map to identify which courses offer which levels of engaged learning. Beginning with the 2013-2014 academic year, all students who declare a major in sociology will be given a shortened version of the Civic Attitudes and Skills Questionnaire (CASQ) developed by Moely et al. (2002). They will be given the CASQ again just prior to graduation. With the new information, we will be able to look for associations between gains in students' civic and political skills and specific courses and activities. The findings will allow for data-driven program development that should strengthen the civic education of sociology majors.

The information, examples, and ideas provided above do not apply solely to sociology programs or to only one university. They can be useful to faculty in many academic units in colleges and universities across the nation who want to broaden their research agendas, become more involved in their community, enhance the learning of their students, and advance the civic dimension of education at their institution. Without curricular changes and enhancement of institutional support, faculty civic engagement may wither on the vine. And, without a broad mix of community-based learning experiences, students may not develop the skills, values, and commitments necessary to become effective participants and leaders in collaborative democratic efforts to identify and reduce social problems.

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